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## ***What are the three challenges you see for the choral profession in Illinois and what do you have about how IL-ACDA might rise to meet these challenges?***

The biggest challenges we are facing in the choral professions are innovating instruction and programming to meet current needs of students, advocacy for recruitment and programming, and support for members in the areas of access, diversity, equity, inclusion, & belonging (ADEIB), retirement, and beyond. As teachers thinking about innovating instruction for the changing adolescent, we can no longer use the “playbook” that has existed from even my student teaching days in the early 2000’s. This next generation of students asks questions and challenges traditions, not satisfied with just accepting the way things have always been done. Choral directors must be willing to broaden their perspectives of what a chorus can be. IL-ACDA should support this innovation by providing round-tables, resources, and professional development opportunities that are forward-thinking.

In terms of advocacy, many choirs have found themselves still struggling to regain the momentum lost during the pandemic. Whether it be financial cutback, enrollment decline, or loss of programming, we’re seeing lower support for music education across the state. This is true even in schools and organizations with historically strong support. As middle schools have shifted attention to work pathways such as Project Lead The Way (PLTW), Business/Finance, or classes that benefit a major in college, this has not only harmed chorus enrollment in middle schools, but has cut off the pipeline that feeds high school programs. We need to use data and research from our collegiate colleagues to show the benefits of music in a liberal arts education. And if more colleges included a fine arts requirement in their admissions policy, such as public universities in California, it would bring the arts into the high school conversations about college readiness.

Many of our younger colleagues are looking at their enrollment numbers and thinking of Plan B’s because being a choral teacher may no longer be sustainable in its current model. If IL-ACDA is open to providing conference sessions to benefit the larger membership, we can help our colleagues feel a real sense of community and relevance that ACDA understands what they are going through on the front lines. Providing resources for our colleagues in Teachers Retirement System (TRS) Tier 2/3 and Chicago Teachers’ Pension Fund (CTPF) will give teachers confidence as they plan their careers. At the same time, it’s imperative that we all get on board with acknowledging and addressing ADEIB issues, as just going along with the status quo will only take us further away from the shore. Our sessions should support teachers as they navigate DEI discussions and foster classrooms that are welcoming to all in our increasingly diverse world. Making choir relevant to our students should be our first goal, and we can’t be relevant without being inclusive. These days I have been thinking how I can make choir “cool” and build an excitement for my classroom that is contagious. Spreading our joy and love of music and innovating choirs in Illinois is imperative to serve the next generation of teachers and inspire students.

***Describe your relationship to and experience in supporting access, diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging within choral music.***

My journey started with attending professional development workshops and learning by taking that first step of awareness to all these various areas ADEIB in choral music. Starting with Beyond Diversity, SEED training, and Unconscious Bias training provided by my school districts, as well as sessions presented by the FAN network and the Women's League of Voters, I realized that there was a large difference between equality and equity. I became aware of the biases I hold as an Asian-American. When looking at the changing choral landscape, I was made more keenly aware of how much more we could be doing in choral music to support ADEIB initiatives.

In terms of access and inclusion, I supported and encouraged my colleagues and used my connections within ACDA to have New Trier's High Five Choir perform at the NC/Central Convention in Milwaukee. This is the first time High Five Choir, a choir of all abilities, was featured at *any* ACDA conference. Since then they have been featured numerous times at IMEC and ACDA. We continually work with our school to ensure students are celebrated, not "othered" while participating in our chorus ensembles. Many of the students in High Five have disabilities both seen and unseen, from both able and ambulatory, to verbal and non-verbal. All are welcomed and included.

In terms of diversity and equity, I was introduced to an equity initiative, Join Voices Chicago, when I was the treasurer and a member of the executive board. In the past year, I joined the DIC committee to help support the Join Voices Chicago and continue to voice my support for equity. If this event were to go unfunded, we would not be able to provide opportunities for Black and brown students within our state, and inequality and access to choral singing would continue to persist. Most importantly, I received a summer grant to do an equity audit of the choral music within our New Trier music library. This audit removed music that was either dated, minstrel pieces, images and lyrics of blatant racism, and or inappropriate content for a 21st century classroom. It was important to acknowledge the past, but also remove these pieces from the performance library and move them into the archives.

Additionally, I have done some personal work by attending a two day training called "Finding the Keys: Antiracist Approaches to Radical Recruitment in the Arts." This has shown me how we need to also take proactive steps to change the language in job postings to provide equity in the choral space. This past year has been a trying year to see where I can lead in regards to inclusion and belonging within choral music, particularly in IL-ACDA. Instead of withdrawing in these tough times, we started meeting together more, we opened more lines of communication to our colleagues to see where we can support one another to feel a sense of belongingness in our organization. I believe that in regards to all ADEIB issues, we are stronger together.

*Please tell us about your leadership outside of conducting an ensemble. What skills did you use in your leadership role(s)?*

I am currently the Director of Choirs which oversees the entire choral strand composed of two other choral colleagues, two accompanists, and a private voice faculty. I also articulate with our six sender school colleagues and organize our township festival. I have recently expanded my role's reach to also support our elementary choral teachers in the many schools that feed into the junior and middle schools. In doing so, I was able to co-present with my colleague at the last ACDA Fall convention featuring great and current literature that is accessible for young voices. This is a position that I applied for in 2020 and was chosen to lead at New Trier by a committee of six people. Although I am younger than my other colleagues, having a vision for our strand and concrete ideas for recruiting and retaining students in the program was pivotal to my selection. Through this role, I have learned ways to listen and support my colleagues so that they can be their best for their respective schools. I handle all things administrative for our team, vet ideas from my colleagues and make sure I communicate and share ideas, listen, and implement suggestions. This is especially important when it comes to the history of New Trier, as most of my colleagues are longer tenured than I am at the school. Knowing how we were able to operate in the past has helped me inform and innovate the future. My strongest skill is being able to network with choral directors in my district and at the state level through ACDA.

I was also the Artistic Director of Youth Choral Theater of Chicago (formally known as Jubilate Choir) from 2016 to 2023. I led board meetings, mobilized parents and board members to further the mission of our choir to get the North Shore of Chicago singing. I used the skills from my Treasurer position to write grants and PPP loan applications to support the choir in various financial avenues. I was in charge of staffing, networking with musicians for our concerts, and leading our organization into its 39th season. As did many non-profits, we had to pare down our organization during the pandemic. Holding to our organization's mission and core values helped guide me through the difficult path forward to keep the organization running while so many others were forced to close.

Lastly, I completed my second masters degree and achieved my Principal's Licensure for administrative services. Through this rigorous program, I learned what it takes to be a good Principal and administrator in public schools. Here I was able to use all my learning in all these various leadership roles to see what type of leader I wanted to be. I used my time management and organization skills to further my education for when I choose to lead through this degree. I have a strong sense of excellence and pride in my work. I have an incredibly strong and supportive family and a partner who runs alongside me to lead in these areas.

***Tell us about your connections to ACDA and/or to the larger choral ecosystem. How will these connections inform your leadership in ACDA?***

My journey began when my colleague, Bob Boyd, encouraged me to attend the summer retreat. I was a part of a smaller group of music educators invited to the retreat and we were included and invited to sit with headliners and learn early in our careers. I went to several summer retreats/conventions and then applied for the Treasurer position in 2015. I served to support largely financial matters. We were in a unique situation where we only had \$26-30k in our savings and we were still looking to outreach and fund seed grants such as Join Voices. The tenor at the time was, “Why are we saving this money for a rainy day? We should be stewards of this budget to support ACDA work within our state, responsibly.” It showed me when leadership has a vision we can accomplish so much more than we could imagine.

Later, ACDA National put out an initiative for mentor teachers to connect with first year teachers. At first, I didn’t think it would apply to me, but I inquired if mid-career teachers could be mentored by someone in leadership. I filled out the form and asked to see if Mary Hopper could be my mentor. I shared with her what areas we were struggling with, and learned a lot about ACDA and her journey into leadership both at the local, regional, and national level. I have treasured my time with all the Presidents I have worked with.

I took a few years off the board to raise my family, and then rejoined in my new role of Children’s Choir Chair. This past year, I accompanied the IMEC reading session for my colleagues, joined the DIC Committee, and have most recently taken the Podium Editor position. What is unique about my involvement in ACDA is that most of my positions and involvement in the board were to fill a need whether it was presenting, choosing music, or accompanying.

One of my biggest strengths is my ability to be adaptive, flexible, and creatively problem solve. My leadership style has been collaborative, practical, and forward thinking. I often ask a lot of questions such as: What are the current and immediate needs? What are the goals and focus of ACDA? What blind spots do I have and who do I seek those answers from? How will we innovate to share the joy of singing?

I take time to listen to my colleagues, and then seek out the experts to share their expertise. Reaching out to the younger generation and building up ACDA’s sense of belongingness would be one of the areas we can become more relevant. Bridging the connection between directors at all levels, we can start round table discussions to support one another in the challenges ahead. We are the teachers for tomorrow, we are on the front lines, and I believe that all my contributions to the board (both seen and unseen) have converged on this moment to help us impact the next generation.